

Southern Local Foods Initiative Update

In December 2014, a meeting of research and Extension faculty was held in Atlanta to explore opportunities for cross-discipline/multi-state initiatives to strengthen capacity related to food systems in the South. As a result of that meeting, the southern local foods initiative has moved forward. During February thru April, over 200 research and Extension faculty were identified in the Southern Region who are working on some aspect of local foods. These faculty were surveyed to learn more details about their programs and around 60 responded. This effort will continue to gain information from as many additional faculty as possible.

The next step was a working meeting, held in Washington, DC in August, to explore what programs currently exists, identify gaps, and develop strategies for strengthening this work together through region-wide collaboration of research, Extension, and teaching professionals. All 200 faculty in the database were invited along with numerous federal agencies' representatives. Data below shows who was in attendance at this meeting (number of participants in parenthesis).

States Represented:

- Alabama (2)
- Arkansas (4)
- Florida (1)
- Kentucky (7)
- Louisiana (1)
- Mississippi (2)
- North Carolina (5)
- Oklahoma (3)
- South Carolina (3)
- Tennessee (2)
- Virginia (14)

Southern Region Organizations:

- ASRED (1)
- SAAESD (1)
- SRDC (2)
- Southern SARE (1)

Federal Agencies Represented:

- USDA (3)
- Ag Marketing Services (3)
- Farm Services Agency (1)
- USDA NIFA (2)
- USDA Rural Development (3)

The plan to move the initiative forward is to develop a SERA proposal. It was decided that one SERA project covering all aspects of local foods would be most advantageous because it would encourage more communication and collaborations among the various sectors involved in this area of research and Extension. The SERA will focus on the four potential goals listed below and a writing committee is currently working on this proposal.

- Develop a resource repository of materials related to local foods initiatives to include Extension publications, curricula, etc.; research, case studies, innovations, data, toolkits, and other relevant materials.
- Organize learning communities among Land-Grant Extension, Teaching, and Research along with external stakeholders and partners. These will be organized around common interests and connected through a communication platform that is searchable.
- Expand regional work around developing common Indicators and tools to measure impact.
- Survey the southern region land grant system to identify models for framing the food systems work within the various land grant universities.
- Identify the top issues around local/regional food systems in order to identify research and Extension opportunities for collaboration on high priority needs.